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The Course for the South

Representation for All

Discriminations long taken for granted in the South are today yielding their bitter harvest. The Southern states are discovering that equal opportunity — as defined not only in the U. S. Constitution, but also in their own laws and constitutions — is expensive and difficult of achievement. They are learning just how unequal our "separate but equal" facilities are, in health, education, housing, recreation, and scores of other public services. Under the pressure of court action, they are discovering that the time is rapidly running out when postponement and token approaches to equalization will suffice.

An Unpaid Debt

The problem is talked about in terms of dollars and cents; repairing the neglect of generations is a costly business. But, as the Southern Regional Council has repeatedly pointed out, the problem is a material one — and something more. The South has an old unpaid debt to its Negro citizens: to reward patience, service, and loyalty with recognition of full citizenship status. This debt will not be satisfied merely by *bestowing* upon the Negro population increased benefits long overdue (although that is an end far from attainment).

As Dr. Benjamin Mays declared recently in New South: "There is a growing conviction among Negroes that if one racial group makes all the laws and administers them, holds all the power and administers it, and has all the public money and distributes it, it is too much to expect that group to deal as fairly with the weak, minority, non-participating group as it deals with its own."

Shift to Democracy

What is needed is a shift from paternalism to democracy. Negroes should have full and fair representation on policy-making and administrative bodies. These would include, of course, boards and commissions governing the whole range of public services. But the need today is of special urgency in the field of education.

In county after county over the South, Federal courts have ruled, or are being asked to rule, that equal

The statement presented here was adopted by the Board of Directors of the Southern Regional Council on November 7, and was approved by the Annual Membership Meeting on the following day.

school facilities must be provided for Negro children without delay. School boards and other public officials are anxiously examining their budgets and making belated starts at improvement. A few politicians, more interested in votes than in progress, are shouting defiance at the courts and seeking to incite the public to anger. Other spokesmen have taken on the futile task of justifying and explaining away the inequalities which are too plain to be denied. Still others, while deploring existing discriminations, deplore even more the filing of law suits demanding correction.

Such protestations are neither justified nor constructive. In view of the long record of evasion and inaction, it is hardly surprising that Negroes are turning with increasing frequency to the courts for the remedy to old injustices. That is a lawful and accepted procedure in our democracy, and should not cause dismay or indignation. On the contrary, it should cause some honest self-examination. School suits, by and large, are the fruits of bad faith. There is every reason to believe that the Negro plaintiffs, like the defendants, would prefer a less expensive and more cooperative method of reaching agreement. The best way to achieve that is for Negroes to have a voice in the policy-making which determines the quality of education children are to receive.

What Is Equal?

Much attention is being focused just now on the attainment of two equal school systems. Who is to say what is equal? In past experience, our only arbiter on that is the courts. And the briefs prepared for the courts by contending parties inevitably stress the mathematics of equality: How many desks, of what model, at what cost, on how many square feet of floor space, for how many white pupils, as compared with how many of each of these for how many Negro pupils. And ultimately, a court must state a formula — a number.

However, true equality is not static arithmetic. It is a running matter. It requires trustworthy day-to-day administration. How can that be contrived? The only answer is representation of all parties on the important policy boards. If we are to have flexibility and order and understanding in the conduct of our school system in the South, we must build a system of school administration which all concerned can believe in.

Honest Representation

In places where boards of education are elective rather than appointive, it is up to qualified Negro persons to seek the office. It need hardly be pointed out that no representation can be effective unless it honestly expresses the feelings of the group represented. In places where boards of education are appointive, public officials will be tempted to appoint persons whose compliance and readiness to please would make for easy agreement. But such appointments will not accomplish their purpose. True agreement — particularly in a matter as sensitive and important as educational opportunity — can be reached only if the minority view is voiced with frankness and considered with respect.

The opportunity is before us to strengthen our region and hasten its progress by admitting all our people to the ranks of our common citizenship. There could be no more appropriate time than now, and no more appropriate field than education, for that step to be taken.

The Task Ahead

By Paul D. Williams
President, Southern Regional Council

As you leave sunny San Antonio, proceeding in a southeasterly direction, you come at last to the beautiful Valley of the Rio Grande. But before reaching the valley, where a veritable paradise awaits you, it is necessary to pass through an area desolate and lonely. Almost the only kind of life that meets the human eye is the cactus plant standing tall, erect, strong, and defiant. Curiously enough, however, there exists on closer observation another form of life which stands in marked contrast to the cactus. It is small, apparently fragile, humble, beautiful, of pinkish hue, growing in the desert as if by a miracle and known to the natives by many names. For our purposes we will call it the primrose.

One can hardly observe these two kinds of vegetation without the imagination taking flight. One kind seems to represent things we can see immediately on the surface; the other we cannot see without the clear vision of the inner eye. There is a certain mystery about the primrose, symbolizing, as it were, the things of the spirit which are not always apparent, but are nonetheless real. The cactus, like the cocksure poet, proclaims proudly in the wilderness: "I am the monarch of all I survey; my right there is none to dispute." But the primrose, speaking calmly, says, "The desert shall blossom like the rose," and then adds with greater confidence, "There are more things in heaven and earth, dear cactus, than are dreamed of in your philosophy."

Cactus Nations

There are cactus nations. One of them most responsible for tension in the world today believes that if you repeat a lie often enough people will believe it. Religion, it says, is the opiate of the people. There are no rights but Caesar's; man has no rights except those extended by the state.

There are also cactus people. Some of them live in the South, and you know them well; and some of them live in the rest of the nation and the world. Shakespeare must have had them in mind when he said:

> Proud man dressed in a little brief authority
> Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
> His glassy essence, like the hairy ape,
> Plays such fantastic tricks before high Heaven
> As make the angels weep.

When he wrote those lines, Shakespeare was thinking of the cactus man, and he had in mind pride, the most deadly of the capital sins. He wrote something entirely different on another occasion, when he envisioned man in his inherent goodness and po-

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This is the full text of SRC President Paul D. Williams' address to the Annual Meeting on November 8. It was the expressed wish of the Meeting that the address be published at the earliest opportunity.

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tentiality: "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason; how infinite in faculty; in form and moving how express and admirable; in action how like an angel; in apprehension how like a god!"

It was its emphasis on the dignity of man — all men without exception — that attracted me to the Southern Regional Council and persuaded me to remain as your president for the past five years. There was a dignity in the meeting at Durham, North Carolina, which produced a remarkable document known as the Durham Statement. The Statement led to our birth as an organization.

The Grand Strategy

When, through our regional office, our State Divisions, and our local committees, we push for the rights of man, there is the tendency to see our work in piecemeal fashion and find it unthrilling and undramatic. When we work for the amendment of the Day Law in Kentucky, justice in the courts of Georgia, Negro policemen, proper and decent news coverage, and civil rights all over the South, we are leading skirmishes for the decent things of life. But we have to remember that all these skirmishes are but a part of the grand strategy — the extension of the democratic ideals and practices for all men. And what do these include? They include fundamental ideas and basic principles that should obtain not only in the South but in the nation and the world:*

1. *The dependence of all men upon God.* In the modern world, especially in the past several decades, there has arisen one of the most dangerous doctrines mankind has ever known, namely, the worship of State and the correlative denial of the rights of the individual and his dependence upon God. This doctrine, which has been expressed in three political movements, Fascism, Nazism, and atheistic Communism, contends that the State is supreme and the individual nothing. But the Founding Fathers of our republic insisted on acknowledging the "laws of nature and of nature's God."

2. *The individual dignity of every human person without distinction as to color, race, or nationality since all men are "made to the image and likeness of God."* Embraced in this principle are the following points:

(a) The rights and duties that follow from this dignity.
(b) The need for law to uphold rights and duties.
(c) The need for government to enforce laws and protect the rights of man.
(d) The obligation of all to respect the authority of the government, which is derived from the authority of God through the people.

3. *The social nature of man, by which he seeks to satisfy his needs with the help of others and forms a multitude of social groups for this purpose.*

4. *The sacredness and integrity of the family.* This principle involves: (a) Bodily health. (b) Economic well-being. (c) Social virtue. (d) Cultural development. (e) Moral fitness.

Dignity of the Worker

5. *The dignity of the worker and his work; the importance of it to himself, his family, and to others.* Two points need to be stressed here:

(a) Workingmen should receive wages sufficient to support their fami-

*Based on a statement by the Commission on American Citizenship, Washington, D. C.

lies and to provide for their future. Wages should be fixed at a point that will assure maximum employment. Prices should be determined on a basis fair to capital, to labor, and the general public.

(b) A fair and just social order, providing for groups of management and labor working together, should be established with government aiding but never dominating their association.

6. *The obligation of all men to use the resources of the earth for the benefit of all.* For many years the natural resources of our country were regarded as the private property of the explorer, the developer or the purchaser. For the past fifty years, however, there has been a growing national consciousness of the need to use these resources for the benefit of the entire community. Hundreds of laws passed by State legislatures as well as by Congress recognize the community's right to protect the common good from anti-social abuses of ownership. This is not an abrogation of private ownership. It is the insistence that ownership entails responsibility to the community.

7. *The obligations of justice and charity that exist between people and nations as between individuals.*

Unity of Men

8. *The unity of all men, having a common origin in God and possessing a common human nature.* Our Founding Fathers believed in this principle so fervently that they were willing to pledge their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor in its defense. In the key sentences of American faith on which our democracy was founded they asserted: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

Beckoning Mirages

But we are getting off our course that leads to the Valley of the Rio Grande. And that can be dangerous, especially in a desert where beckoning mirages may interfere with the steps we must take to reach our destination.

One of these mirages is that overworked shibboleth "states' rights." I say "shibboleth" because the term has been abused so often and in so many ways that it has lost almost all rational meaning. States do have rights, of course. The United States Constitution expressly declares: "The powers not delegated to the United States, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people." This gives state governments, as representatives of their people, the right to take whatever action they wish — so long as that action does not conflict with the Constitution and laws of our nation.

That last qualification is the one that has been lost somewhere in the shuffle. The professional "states' righters" of today use the term as though it sanctioned unbridled license by the states, or groups within the states, to ignore everybody's rights except their own. These ardent supporters of an outworn doctrine blind themselves completely to the Fourteenth Amendment, for example, which imposes on the states the duty of providing for all citizens equal pro-

tection of the laws. Those who revere "states' rights" rarely extend that reverence to the civil and human rights which are far more precious and deserve the most jealous protection. On the contrary, we find "states' rights" used to justify denial of the legal rights of whole groups of our population. It is a trumpet call which, unlike the one at Jericho, is designed to *erect* walls — new walls to protect old undemocratic practices. But no amount of breast-beating oratory is going to keep those walls from tumbling down. Whether we like it or not, we are deeply and irrevocably involved with the rest of the nation — and with the rest of the world. It is no longer possible to barricade ourselves behind sectionalism, prejudice, and discrimination, and pretend that we are living in another century.

'Leave Us Alone'

A second mirage found in the desert and in our region we may call the "leave us alone" philosophy. It would be a mistake to brand everyone in that school of thought an apologist for discrimination. Many people sincerely feel that the right way for our biracial society to advance in justice and cooperation is to keep our problems "in the family," as it were, and resist any advice or criticism from outside. That is partly explained by the sensitive scars which, even after eighty years, throb angrily at the thought of "outside interference." An added explanation is the natural pride of any people in their ability to keep their own house in order.

Though we understand these convictions and respect the people who honestly hold them, we in the Southern Regional Council are convinced that such defensiveness is tragically in error. Indeed, a large part of the Council's purpose is to make the South see that our hope lies in fitting ourselves more closely into the framework of the nation, in economy as well as in human relations. We prize nothing more than a willingness on the part of Southerners of both races to take the lead in building a better South; that is the very basis of our existence. But we are not naive enough to imagine that our problems will be solved without any action by Congress, any recourse to the Federal courts, any criticism or help from private agencies and individuals outside the region. The South's progress in the past has followed no such isolationist pattern, and we do not cherish the deluded hope that it will do so in the future.

Education As Cure-All

A third and more complex mirage is the notion that education, and education alone, is the magic formula which will solve all our problems. Let me make it perfectly clear that I am a great respecter of education — both the formal variety which reaches our children through the schools, and the more diffuse variety which may reach any of us in our everyday activities. I would like to see the benefits of both kinds extended, so that all our people might be better equipped to live full, productive lives. But I cannot share the optimism and single-mindedness of those who claim that education of some unspecified sort is going to bring us to the millenium. It will help, but as an exclusive remedy for our ills it has definite shortcomings.

The main shortcoming consists in the obvious fact that there is no such thing as education in a vacuum. It cannot be divorced from our legal, political, economic, religious, and so-

cial institutions — all of which education affects and is affected by. We cannot have sound education in an unsound society. The people who are waiting for education to reform the world will wait a long time in vain. They might be reminded, too, that education — whether it be defined as the barest literacy or as possession of a Ph.D. — is no guarantee of virtue. Fairmindedness, love of justice, concern for one's fellow man, faith in democratic practices — these are qualities that are not necessarily bestowed along with a college degree. And, even if they were, we could hardly afford to sit idle until that distant day when everyone could boast of a sheepskin. By education many people conceive of a brick-by-brick process with a hundred years between bricks. Such a notion is not tenable in today's swift-moving atomic age.

I very much fear that those who insist exclusively on the ameliorating effects of education are trying to lull themselves or others into a state of slumbering complacency.

Gradualism

These mirages, these illusory hopes I have mentioned have one thing in common — they rest on the assumption that we have an unlimited amount of time to correct the failings of our democracy. In this respect, they are what is often called "gradualism." I hesitate to use the word at all, for it, too, has become almost meaningless through so many conflicting uses. In one sense, everybody — with the possible exception of a few visionaries — is a gradualist. Many of us would like to see our society perfected in the next day or so, or in the next year, but we are realistic enough not to expect it to happen. Accordingly, most people who are working for change operate on some sort of timetables, which differ from each other in degree. I do not intend to try to blueprint a method of determining the ideal pace at which to proceed. I do not believe there *is* an ideal pace. What is needed is a variety of approaches to the same problems by sincere people of differing persuasions, temperaments, and senses of urgency.

Do-nothingism

Be that as it may, we can safely draw one line on the gradualist scale. That is at the point where people find it possible to champion noble causes without making themselves or anybody else uncomfortable. At that point, gradualism becomes do-nothingism; the "time" is never "ripe" for effective action; there is always a good reason to put off till tomorrow what should have been done yesterday; one pays lip service to the highest ideals and, in the same breath, utters a multitude of arguments against any real effort to achieve them.

Gradualists of this stripe like to refer to themselves as "realists" and pride themselves on their "practical" outlook. It is a pity that their outlook does not have a broader range. If it did, they might see the South's problems in the light of the world situation. They might see the doubt and criticism in the eyes of two-thirds of the world's people who are not convinced that our kind of democracy is available to people of their color. They might even make out some disturbing handwriting on the wall, which says quite plainly that there is little time left to be complacent about injustice and inequality.

But, impelling as this international view is, there is an even more urgent

reason for asking, "How much time do we have?" It lies close to home and is in terms of human beings rather than abstractions. We might ask those who are smug such questions as these, for example: How much time do we have to provide equal educational opportunity for a child who, in a few short years, will have all the education he is ever going to get? How much time do we have to make medical facilities available for a fellow citizen who may die in a few weeks, or a few days, for the want of them? How much time do we have to assure safety of the person to a man who may be maimed or killed tomorrow because a double-standard of law enforcement failed to protect him?

These are not melodramatic examples. If they seem so, it is only because we have to shield ourselves from the naked view of discriminations as they affect individuals. It is our obligation to keep our consciences awake to these suffering and wasted lives. So long as we do, we will hardly settle for the comfortable theory that evolution will eventually put things right.

The South's Destination

There is a road that leads from San Antonio on to the Valley of the Rio Grande. And when we reach our destination perhaps we may view the ideal Southern community of the future where there is political, economic, social, racial, and religious harmony because men of good will live there who recognize God's moral law — the only true basis for peace and understanding among men.

But we have to be worthy of our destination. As an earnest of our worthiness, we must avoid the mirages that would lure us off our way. We must look beyond the cactus and see once again the delicate primrose. Every step we take to overcome littleness and falsehood in our relations with our fellow man, every advance we make along the path of justice is another testimony to what deep down in our hearts we all know to be the truth: that our Southland and our nation is great not because it is large in area, or rich in natural resources, or skillful in techniques, or masterful in industries — but, above and beyond all such advantages, because it is a nation founded upon right and dedicated to the principle that God's eternal law and man's dignity, derived from and responsible to his Creator, stand unshaken and will forever stand unshaken as long as we have a United States of America.

With God's help, quicker perhaps than any one of us realizes, we will reach the Valley of the Rio Grande.

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SOUTHERN REGIONAL COUNCIL

63 Auburn Avenue, N. E.

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Paul D. Williams.....*President*
Guy B. Johnson.....*Vice-President*
Carter Wesley.....*Vice-President*
Harold L. Trigg.....*Vice-President*
John H. Wheeler.....*Vice-President*
Charles S. Johnson....*Chmn. Exec. Com.*
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